



LONDON UNDERGROUND TICKET OFFICE SURVEY

Introduction

TSSA is recognised by Transport for London and London Underground for collective bargaining purposes and over the last few years the Union has been in the thick of resisting cuts to ticket offices imposed by the previous London Mayor, Boris Johnson. That change was introduced in April 2016 and meant that not only were ticket offices closed across the Underground but staff were sought for voluntary redundancy in circa of 800 jobs cut across stations and others were reassigned to work on concourses and platforms carrying out multi-functional duties with tickets only being issued from machines. The reduction of posts across LU stations have since left staff unable to cope with the demands of running busy stations and many station control rooms, where communication and alarm systems should be monitored have been closed.

With the announcement by Sadiq Khan, the new Mayor, that a review would be carried out of the ticket office closures and new working practices imposed through the Fit for Future (FFtF) scheme, TSSA decided in September 2016 to carry out its own six monthly assessment. Our purpose was to ensure that by a survey of staff their voice would not be lost in the broader analysis of the FFtF arrangement and followed on from reports of heightened safety concerns by members.

TSSA's safety impact survey ran from 26th September to 7th October 2016 and was designed to be completed by LU Station staff, namely Customer Service Assistant (CSA) members.

Summary of results

The results from the survey have showed up some startling evidence that reveals a passenger service system in deep crisis. Amongst those results are that:

- A staggering 80% of TSSA members now feel less safe at work than they did before FFtF was introduced;
- 74% of our members report increases in passenger frustrations with ticket machines;
- A spike in abuse towards customer facing staff, 70.45% now reporting an increase in physical or verbal abuse or attacks since the ticket offices closed;

- More than 12,000 separate incidents of passenger abuse towards CSAs have been recorded on a company issued ipad app;
- This has caused increased stress at work adversely impacting on staff work-life balance with some members reporting work is now exhausting, anxiety-inducing, disrupting their sleep patterns with some members reporting they are afraid of going to and being at work;
- Staff cuts have left many surface stations unstaffed or with employees having to deal with lone working issues;
- Staff cuts have resulted in station security checks not being carried out in accordance with the correct safety procedures with asset checks being skipped and less safety checks taking place;
- Some sub surface stations remain open even when they do not have sufficient staff on duty in contravention of the fire safety legislation whilst others have to rely on overtime working to stay open;
- Not enough ticket machines to cope with demand in peak periods, give refunds, provide replacement Oyster cards, or give change to large bank notes;
- Fare evasion is now more likely than pre April.

To cope with the crisis, London Underground has instigated practices that TSSA members have told us include:

- Long shift patterns with some members reporting that they have been rostered to work for eight consecutive days;
- A lack of training and a failure to retain new staff leading to overstretched rosters;
- The pressure to do overtime - reported by 80% of survey respondents - of which there is more than ever before;
- Part-time staff now being asked to work additional hours;
- Full-time staff now being asked to work additional overtime to assist with Night Tube, contrary to agreement reached with the unions at ACAS and the recruitment of part-time staff designed to cover Night Tube only.

All of this has resulted in the staff having a lack of faith in management to resolve the crisis.

When asked how they would improve customer service and their own work environment, all respondents wanted:

- an increase in staffing levels;
- a return to dedicated ticket offices
- no more lone working and

- a return to the way it was before FFtF which includes reinstating the Special Requirement Teams of extra staff to be laid on at stations which cope with big events - sporting, musical, etc.

Results in more depth

Members participating in the survey worked across the Underground network at a range of stations, including many connected to National Rail stations and others that act as interchanges between different LU Lines.

QUESTION: Has the ticket office been closed at your station?

95% reported that their ticket office had already been closed.

QUESTION: If yes, please tell us the impact this has had on queues, inquiries and congestion at your station.

Broken down into a number of categories based on reports from survey participants, the impact of ticket office closures has been that:

1. **Ticket machines.** Long queues form at ticket machines at most stations, especially at peak periods. This problem has been exasperated because of issues with ticket machines that frequently crash causing frustration. In fact, 74% of our members report increases in passenger frustrations with ticket machines.

In addition, difficulties are caused for disabled people or people with special needs who may be unable to operate the POMs whilst tourists and infrequent travellers can also struggle to use the ticket machines.

Some members report that their stations are now cash free so they are unable to assist passengers buying their tickets with this means.

2. **Staff.** Heavy increases in enquiries because machines fail more often than before which takes a member of staff away from the front line and puts pressure on colleagues;

This problem is made worse because there are insufficient staff to cover all the duties, eg, at some stations, covering the ticket machine leaves the gateline unstaffed;

Many stations in the outlying areas of the tube which used to have at least two members of staff on duty during the morning and evening peak now only have one with the result that station exits go unstaffed with issues around ticketless travel;

3. **Safety.** There aren't enough staff present at some stations that come under the sub surface legal requirementsⁱ that require a minimum of two staff on duty when members of the public have access to the premises.

In some locations, members report that the station control room is not being covered in traffic hours, something they have called “a disaster waiting to happen.”

QUESTION: Have you noticed an increase in either verbal or physical abuse or attacks toward staff since the ticket offices have been closed?

HEADLINE: 70.45% of members reported an increase in either verbal or physical abuse or attacks toward staff since the ticket offices have been closed.

We went onto ask members to describe examples of this behaviour that they had experienced from customers. In response, we were told about instances that included being spat at, bitten, physically intimidated or called abusive words - usually with a plethora of other swear words.

The scale of the problem can be seen from the report that we received that the company has issued staff with an app that can be used on their work supplied ipads. The app is called WASB (Workplace Anti Social Behaviour) and notifications on this of verbal abuse instances are now around 12,000, a stark increase on what was previously reported.

The abuse and attacks experienced by CSA members has been attributed by them to factors including:

- customers getting angry when staff can't provide the same service that was available from the Ticket office
- demands to re-open closed ticket offices when staff are perceived to be standing around;
- staff trapped at barriers become the object of abuse;
- customers upset at the queues and taking it out on frontline staff;
- lack of staff at stations leads to abuse because it causes delays and frustrations;
- ticket machine issues:
 - not being fit for purpose;
 - ticket machines breaking down and causing delays to passengers;
 - ticket machines that don't take cash, others that don't accept cards;
 - people getting frustrated that the machine does not have change which means that the passenger has to leave and go to a shop if the machine is not working or is not accepting cards;
 - passengers get frustrated when they don't know how to operate the machines;
- inability of the staff to be able to carry out Oyster refunds and contactless cards being referred to issuer as well as incomplete journeys not being able to be resolved;
- people upset that the service isn't fast enough;

- use of contactless cards that let passengers travel but doesn't let them out of the barrier because they cannot prove whether they have touched in or not.

QUESTION: What is your perception of your own safety at work in the last 12 months?

HEADLINE: 80% of TSSA members felt less safe at work in London Underground now than they did prior to the introduction of FFtF.

When we asked if staff at stations felt more safe, not one of them said they did.

QUESTION: Please give details of any times when staff numbers have fallen below the legal safety minimum requirements since Fit for the Future was implemented in April or if safety has been compromised at your station due to fewer staff being available on the roster.

In a series of answers from members, themes that emerged showed that:

- Some sub surface stations remain open in contravention of Section 12 of the Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) Regulations 1989 by having insufficient staff on duty, in some cases as often as once a week;
- On other occasions, we have had reports that sub surface stations have either had to be closed because of staff shortages or are only open because they are covered by staff working overtime;
- Surface stations are regularly left unstaffed, some reportedly for as long as seven consecutive shifts;
- Some members reported long periods of lone working at stations, including during the Night Tube.

QUESTION: Has your job become more difficult or stressful since the introduction of night tube? Please explain.

From the number of responses received, it has become apparent that where the Night Tube has been implemented, employees are finding that:

- they are forced to do overtime because there are always staff shortages
- due to lack of training only a few staff are doing what is required (eg, not all staff are trained on ticket machines so that leaves sometimes only one member of staff to deal with all the note jams, banking and POM refunds);
- inadequate rest periods between shifts;
- pressure from CSMs adds to the stress already encountered in dealing with the job;
- the shifts are very stressful, especially when in a lone working situation one person has to deal with all the customers and has no help available;

- because the rosters have changed, there is no work life balance leading to fatigue and stress;
- at terminal stations, staff find it more stressful, getting all the trouble at the end of the line, from drunk to homelessness to people fighting, etc;
- dealing with people who are drunk is a lot harder as there are not sufficient staff at times to cope. When other staff are available, they can be just too busy to help;
- the level and number of intoxicated people coming through stations at weekends has risen a lot, and members report that they feel this has led to increases in the level of verbal abuse staff have received from people at weekends.

QUESTION: Do you feel compelled to work overtime, have you been asked to work longer hours or have your shift patterns and rosters significantly changed since Fit for the Future was implemented?

Over 80% of staff responding said they had felt compelled to work overtime with frequent requests being made and many going onto cite a lack of staff as the cause. Many also complained about inadequate work life balances as a consequence and some have reported that they are seeking to change to part time work.

QUESTION: What has your experience been of Night Tube?

Of those members who had experienced working the Night Tube, the most consistent response was that it is very demanding dealing with people who are drunk and that it is a nightmare when working alone. It was also felt to be rushed into operation and as result has been underfunded, under-planned and under-resourced. Some members have also felt betrayed by the reasoning for the Night Tube because all they encounter are people who are drunk or high on drugs whilst there is no sign of the manual workers who allegedly needed it so badly. There is also a feeling that the whole exercise is a waste of money and should be ended when TfL and LU are seeking to cut their costs.

QUESTION: What do you suggest would improve your working environment to make work less stressful for you, colleagues and passengers?

In a number of responses, CSA members almost universally from across the LU network suggested:

- return to the pre FFtF position and re-open the ticket offices to provide a proper customer service and ease the pressure on queues at ticket machines;
- increase staffing to deal with the issues of understaffing and excessive overtime working;

- review all rosters and reduce the number of stations required to be covered by each roster as well as to ban lone working;
- review working practices to remove excessive workloads that cannot be encompassed on one shift;
- improve training by giving employees the chance to receive opportunities for proper time away from work to be trained, moving away from e-learning that staff cannot fit into their working time (and is thus inadequate). Many staff members report that they just don't receive training.

Conclusion

TSSA is deeply alarmed by the results of this survey and is calling on the Mayor to carefully listen to the outcome as part of his review of the FFtF changes. It is clear from our perspective that FFtF is a deeply flawed concept in the way that it has been implemented which has already led to a series of health, safety and security concerns, both for staff and passengers which should set serious alarm bells ringing.

What's more, the implications on the levels of customer service within the Tube network have already become apparent as the travelling experience for many passengers can be seen as one of frustration and annoyance, something that they would not expect to find in London, one of the world's most important and popular capital cities.

Instead of the botched scheme that originated from the pursuit of financial objectives under the previous Mayor of London, TSSA is demanding that our concerns, the concerns of our members, are properly and immediately addressed.

ⁱ Section 12 of the Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) Regulations 1989 (Section 12 and Regulation 10(2) of The Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) (England) Regulations 2009